



[Cyril Smith, 1929 - 2008](#)

## Marxism, or Marx?

[Cyril Smith](#), late in life, and following the fall of the Soviet Union, felt himself free enough to challenge the principle Shibboleths of Marxism, including the word “Marxism” itself. Students may think that here and there, Smith did not quite succeed in resolving all his issues. For example, he approves Marx's aim of “development of communist consciousness on a mass scale” but disapproves, in another place, of what he considers to be Lenin’s determination to do the same thing “from outside” (This CU course will continue to examine that particular question).

But otherwise, Cyril Smith succeeds admirably to hit and to knock down his targets, which are the dead wood and the rotten branches of 165 years and more of “theory”, and he does us a great service thereby.

This makes Smith's work ideal as a means of introducing to this course a set of propositions about the work of Marx, Engels and their successors, and asking whether their ideas have stayed on track, or whether they have been reversed, or overturned, by those who have claimed to be their carriers down the years.

We may quickly get close to the heart of the matter by first looking at Smith's talk on "The Communist Manifesto After 150 Years" (attached, and linked below), and in particular at the section headed "The Subject of History". In this section, the daily practice of communists ("to educate, organise and mobilise") coincides with the most profound depths of philosophy. It begins:

*"Marx's problem was to discover the possibility for humanity, individually and collectively, to take conscious charge of its own life, and to find this possibility within bourgeois society. Communism would mean that humans would cease to be prisoners of their social relations, and begin purposively to make their own history. In other words, we should cease to be mere objects and start to live as subjects."*

It is not unreasonable to say that this is the whole matter of Marx, Lenin, communism and the work of all the communists that have ever been. This text is offered as the main reading and discussion text for this part. You may use the section on "The Subject of History" for discussion, because it is concise

and sufficient, but do also, if possible, read the entire document, for the light that it sheds upon the [Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848.

**Image:** The late Cyril Smith's passport photograph.

The full Cyril Smith archive on MIA [can be found here](#).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Communist Manifesto after 150 years, 1998, Smith](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).